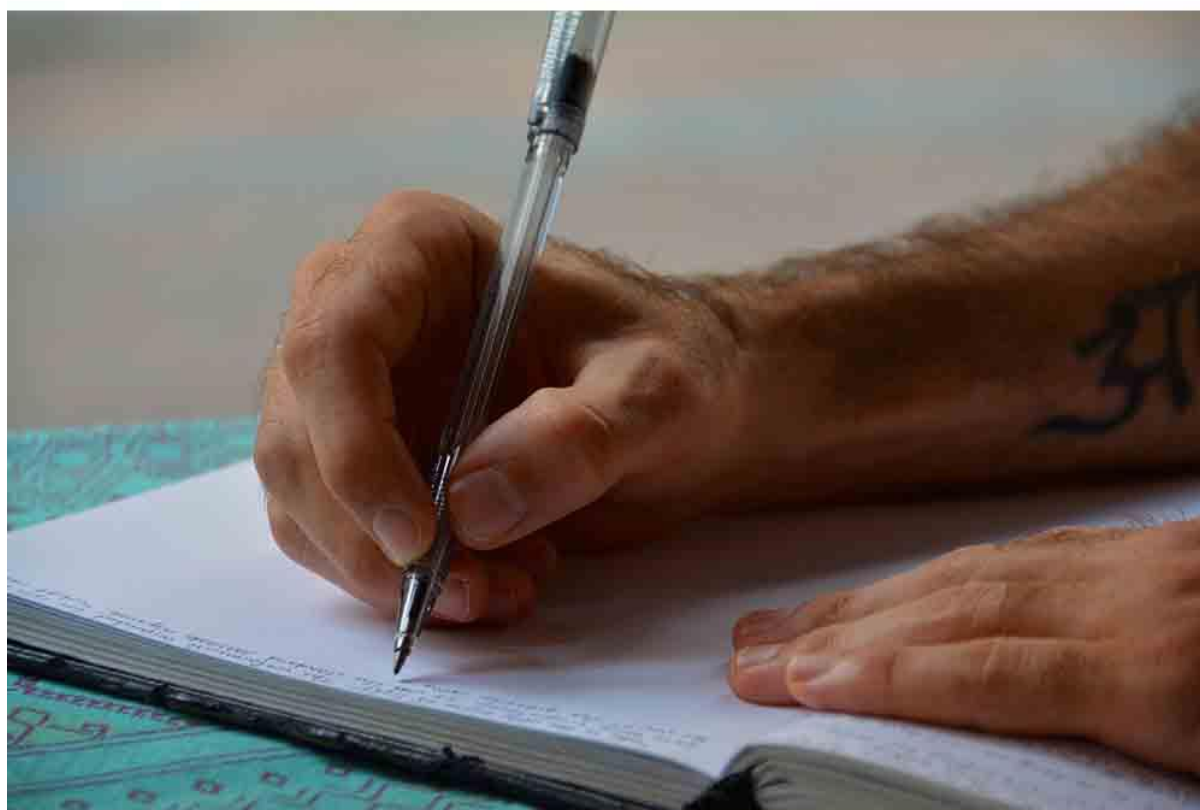


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Deconstructing Disability in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Abstract

In the neo-liberal era, “able” and “disable” creates a binary thinking wherein, the former term is privileged and the latter “marginalized.” By applying deconstruction in, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, the paper attempts to analyze the concepts of “able” and “disable” as mere social constructs and how both the terms constitute each other, rather than create a world of hierarchy. In the poststructuralist era, language is filled with contradiction, unreliability, openness, word play, multiplicities and pluralities of meaning, which differ and defer in an unending chain of signification, due to the lack of a transcendental signified. Language is a process of bricolage; hence, it is in itself disabled. The world represented by language is a simulation. Post modernity is comprised by an endless circulation of copies. Hence, reality is characterized by disorder and chaos. People try to make sense of their irrational world. In such a context, who is able and who is disable? Is it Christopher, the protagonist of the novel-a fifteen year old autistic boy with savant syndrome, who observes and depicts the world in a Mathematical and Scientific discourse, who creates order through time-tables, maps, graphs, pictures and equations-who

is disabled? Through the deconstructive analysis of disability, the paper attempts to re-examine the structured and preconceived notions of marginalizing the disabled.

Key Terms: Ability, Disability, Social construct, Deconstruction.

The term ‘disabled’ was used by the people in United Kingdom who fought for disability rights, to “signify a person who is disabled by a society’s inability to accommodate all of its members in the mainstream, hence shifting the problem from the individual to the social system.”(Rao and Agrawal 12) The term ‘disability’ varies from one society to another based on cultural and attitudinal differences. For instance, Tobin Siebers in his “Disability Theory” mentions about Geel, which has been a haven for people with mental disabilities since 600 AD. Legend has it that the King of Oriel, decided to marry his own daughter Dymphna upon the death of his wife. She was killed by her father when she resisted his advances and it was believed that she had special powers over people with mental illness, and she became their patron saint. As the legend of Saint Dymphna spread far and wide, Geel became increasingly known as a center for the treatment of mental disability. The church arranged infirmary to house arrivals in 1430 but the influx of people seeking a new home, and the arrivals began to board with the people of the city. In this manner, the people of Geel became accustomed to the mentally disabled and accepted their presence among them as their pride. Hence, the term ‘Disabled’ is not universal and but ambiguous.

In Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher deconstructs “learning disability” and “special needs.” The notion of both these terms appear stupid to Christopher; he indicates that everyone has learning difficulties like comprehending relativity, studying new languages and everyone has special needs like his father-Ed Boone-who carries a packet of artificial sweetening tablets to prevent diabetes, Mrs. Peters wears hearing aid, Siobhan-his school teacher-wears thick glasses and none of them are special

needs. He decides to take A level in Mathematics and secure an A grade to prove that he is not stupid.

The novel opens up with Wellington- the black poodle of Mrs. Shears- impaled by a garden fork, seven minutes after midnight. Christopher, a fifteen year old boy with savant syndrome, who has excellent memory and loves to solve problems, uses mathematical and scientific discourses to solve the curious incident of Wellington. Christopher writes this book on the mystery of Wellington's murder. But he constantly deviates from his topic and portrays his observations and inferences on the world around him. The novel starts with chapter two, three etc, since he likes prime numbers. According to him "...prime numbers are like life. They are very logical but you could never work out the rules..." (Haddon 7).

Christopher "liked things to be in a nice order" (Haddon 12) and one way was to be logical and the other was his belief of Good Days and Black Days based on the number of red cars and yellow cars respectively. He explains to Mr. Jeavons- the psychologist at school- that everyone has their own belief that makes them happy- when they see the sun shine in the morning- and sad- when they see that it is raining. Timetables create structure in Christopher's life, a sense of control and security. Just like how he hates strangers, being in France unable to understand their language, he feels lost and helpless. He formulates plans, maps, drawings, graphs, equations and timetables to make life structured. Monty Hall problem, Conway's soldiers' games, Mathematical problems makes him relaxed.

There are mysteries in this world to which scientists have not found the answers yet. Christopher gives the example of people's belief in ghosts and he makes a graph of frogs in a pond at his school, to show that some mysteries are not mysteries at all; he applies the formula for a population of animals and arrives at a solution "that sometimes things are so complicated that it is impossible to predict what they are going to do next."

Christopher “find(s) people confusing” (Haddon 8) because they speak a lot without words and they use metaphors like “they had a skeleton in the cupboard,” “He was the apple of my eye,” “we had a real pig of a day” etc (Haddon 9). He says that metaphor should be termed as a lie because it doesn’t fit under the framework of rationally. He needs exact definition, precision and structure in order to comprehend his world. For example, a sign “keep off the grass” doesn’t signify vivid meaning – “it should say KEEP OFF THE GRASS AROUND THIS SIGN or KEEP OFF ALL THE GRASS IN THIS PARK” (Haddon 14); he is dubious when his father says “Try and keep your nose out of other people’s business” (Haddon 11) because he does “lots of things with other people, at school and in the shop and on the bus” (Haddon 15) and his father’s job is fixing the boilers and heating of other people; when his mother says to remain silent he wants to know for how long; he has difficulty with rhetorical questions, for example, when his father found out that he was trespassing in other people’s garden to investigate about Wellington’s murder, he says, “...How stupid are you?” (Haddon 36). Christopher gives the example of The Case of the Cotingley Fairies to prove that fairies do not exist. Christopher doesn’t believe in God and heaven. Mrs Forbes at school believes in heaven and says that Judy Boone is in heaven after her demise. When Reverend Peters says, “heaven is not in our universe. It’s another kind of place altogether” (Haddon 16) he deconstructs the logos of heaven by stating that there isn’t “another kind of place altogether” except for black holes.

Christopher’s world shatters with his father’s lie, regarding his mother and Wellington’s murder. Love signified trust and was broken by his father; Christopher’s structure of love was dismantled, which resulted in his escape from his father. He is dejected when he learns from his mother that he won’t be able to take the A level exam. In the end, he secures an A in his exam; he realizes that he is brave since he found his mother, solved the mystery of Wellington and wrote a book, thus he could do anything.

There are able and disabled people surrounding Christopher and everyone lacks ability in one way or another – Mrs. Forbes, after the motorcycle accident, has one leg which is shorter than the other; Mr. Wise's mother is in a wheelchair; Mrs. Alexander is slightly deaf; Wellington became schizophrenic after its operation; Even the life on earth resulted from an accident due to three conditions- Replication, Mutation and Heritability (Haddon 76). Foucault's discourse of religion considers Mr. Shears, Judy Boone, Mrs. Shears and Ed Boone as sinners; in the discourse of law, Ed Boone is seen as a culprit and the discourse of illness depicts Judy as a patient. Hence people are characterized by ability and disability.

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